



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 20 – 26 April 2015



25-26 Apr 1944 Second Lieutenant Carter Harman of the 1st Air Commando Group (standing at left in the photo) made the **first U.S. Army Air Forces combat rescue by helicopter**.



In late April 1944, a 1st Air Commando L-1 aircraft crash-landed deep behind Japanese lines in Burma. Three wounded British soldiers were aboard. Lt. Harman flew his Sikorsky YR-4B helicopter from his base in India on a circuitous 500-mile route to avoid Japanese forces. He had to stop for fuel every 100 miles at landing zones cut out of the Burma jungles by allied ground commandos. Harman flew to a clearing near the crash site. Partly due to the heat and humidity, Harman's helicopter could carry only one

passenger at a time. Harman picked up the first British soldier and took him to an emergency strip prepared by British commandos on a sand-bar 10 miles away. After retrieving the second soldier, an overheated engine forced him to stop flying for the rest of the day and remain at the sandbar overnight. Harman made two more trips on the next day to complete the rescue, and was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

21 Apr 1948 **KEY WEST AGREEMENT.** The SECDEF issued a memo to his Secretaries with a paper defining the functions of the services and the JCS. It was the first delineation of functions drawn up after the National Security Act of 1947. The Air Force received primary responsibility for the air defense of America and the strategic nuclear bombing mission. **WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN:** The Air Force did not get carrier-based aircraft, which were retained by the Navy for naval campaigns. Since aircraft that attack ships can also attack targets on land, the agreement did not prevent a significant Air Force-Navy airpower rivalry. **WHAT DID HAPPEN:** Army and Marine Corps air capabilities were limited relative to the Air Force and the Navy. With little faith that other services would provide robust air support, the Army developed its own "air force" in the form of attack helicopters while the Marine Corps ultimately preserved its independent air wings. An effective, systematic concept for airpower unity of command was developed only after the Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986 and the creation of the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept.

22 Apr 1953 **New fighter mission in Korea.** Due to shortages of fighter-bombers that had been performing armed reconnaissance of enemy lines of communication, Fifth Air Force assigned the mission to the F-86 Sabres of the 4th and 51st Fighter Interceptor Wings (FIWs). In the photo at right, a 1954 flight of F-86 Sabres from the 51 FIW is led by the Wing Commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis.





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23 Apr 1965 The first operational **C-141 Starlifter** was delivered to Travis AFB, California.



Capable of crossing any ocean nonstop at more than 500 miles per hour, the Starlifter could transport up to 68,500 pounds of payload, including 154 troops, 123 paratroopers, or a combination of troops and supplies. The C-141 replaced slower, piston-engined cargo planes in both strategic and tactical airlift missions, and it provided critical support to U.S. forces in Vietnam and Southwest Asia. The photo at left is from the cover page of Lockheed's C-141

[Roll-Out Brochure](#).

26 Apr 1966 **The Navy leaves MAC.** As recommended by the Air Force and the Navy, the SECDEF discontinued Navy participation in the Military Airlift Command (MAC). The Army's Air Transportation Command and the Naval Air Transport Service had joined under the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) in 1948 and assigned to the newly independent U.S. Air Force. MAC replaced MATS on 1 Jan 1966, and Navy units still flew with MAC until 26 April.

26 Apr 1966 **First MiG-21 kill.** An F-4C crew used Sidewinder missiles to shoot down a MiG-21 over North Vietnam. Major Paul J. Gilmore and 1Lt William T. Smith of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing were escorting F-105 Thunderchiefs near Hanoi when the MiGs attacked.



MiG-21



F-4C

24 Apr 1980 **Operation EAGLE CLAW.** More than 50 American hostages were captives of militant Iranians at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. A complex rescue plan was prepared. USAF special operations C-130s were to insert Army Rangers at a site in central Iran ("Desert One") and later at an airfield near Tehran. Navy RH-53 helicopters flown by Marine pilots were to follow the C-130s to Desert One, get refueled by the C-130s and then fly the Rangers to a hide site near Tehran. CIA agents were to truck the Rangers to the embassy for the rescue and then move the Rangers and hostages to a nearby soccer stadium.







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The helicopters would fly everyone from the stadium to the secured airfield, where the helicopters would be destroyed and USAF C-141 transports would fly all personnel out of Iran. Air Force AC-130 gunships were to provide close air support for the rescue, helicopter extraction and the seizure of the airfield. Navy fighters were to cover the withdrawal of the C-141s.

On 24 April 1980, the attempt to rescue the hostages was aborted after night-time sandstorms and mechanical difficulties reduced the number of RH-53 helicopters to an insufficient force. As U.S. forces prepared to withdraw, an RH-53 collided with a C-130 on the dark, windy landing site in Iran, killing eight servicemen. The entire force was then extracted on the C-130s.

Colonel James Kyle, USAF, Desert One on-scene commander, from his book *The Guts to Try*: “The C-130 crews and combat controllers had not failed in any part of the operation and had a right to be proud of what they accomplished,” Kyle said. “They inserted the rescue team into Iran on schedule, set up the refueling zone, and gassed up the helicopters when they finally arrived. Then, when things went sour, they saved the day with an emergency evacuation by some incredibly skillful flying. They had gotten the forces out of Iran to fight another day — a fact they can always look back on with pride.”



Air Force servicemembers of the 8th Special Operations Squadron killed in Operation EAGLE CLAW were (left to right):

Capt. Richard Bakke,  
Tech. Sgt. Joel Mayo,  
Capt. Lyn McIntosh,  
Capt. Hal Lewis and  
Capt. Charles McMillan.

See the [USAF article](#).

23 Apr 2001 An **RQ-4A Global Hawk** remotely piloted aircraft completed the first nonstop trans-Pacific flight by an unmanned air vehicle. The aircraft flew from the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB, California to Edinburgh, Australia, covering some 7,500 miles in about 23 hours. The flight demonstrated the Global Hawk's high-altitude, long-range capabilities. See the USAF [RQ-4 Fact Sheet](#). (RQ-4 photo at right.)



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